From: "Mochrie, Paul" <Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca>
To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"
CC: "City Manager's Correspondence Group - DL"
"Dobrovolny, Jerry" <jerry.dobrovolny@vancouver.ca>
Date: 6/19/2019 7:07:18 PM
Subject: Memo - Next Steps re: the False Creek Flats Arterial
Attachments: ENG - TPL - Memo - Next Steps re FC Flats Arterial - June 2019.pdf

---

Dear Mayor and Council,

Please see attached above a memo from Jerry Dobrovolny on the next steps regarding the False Creek Flats Arterial. A summary of the memo is as follows:

- The Flats Arterial Community Panel Final Report, including the panel's values, evaluation, prioritization of routes, and route recommendation, has informed the next steps that staff are undertaking before seeking a Council decision in the fall of 2019 on the alignment for a grade separated arterial in the Flats.

- Over the coming months, staff plan to focus on the Community Panel's top preferred options, including the National-Charles overpass and Prior/Venables underpass, and explore ways to reduce the costs and mitigate or lessen impacts of each option.

- Next steps include further technical analysis and costing of the National-Charles option, hiring an independent consultant to refine cost estimates, exploring opportunities to lessen traffic impacts on Prior Street, incorporating previous stakeholder and public input, and exploring external funding opportunities.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Jerry Dobrovolny at 604.873.7331 or jerry.dobrovolny@vancouver.ca.

Thank you,
Paul

Paul Mochrie | Deputy City Manager
Office of the City Manager | City of Vancouver
paul.mochrie@vancouver.ca
604.873.7666

CITY OF VANCOUVER

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

CITY OF VANCOUVER

ENGINEERING SERVICES
Jerry W. Dobrovolny, P.Eng., MBA
City Engineer / General Manager

MEMORANDUM

June 19, 2019

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Sadhu Johnston, City Manager
Paul Mochrie, Deputy City Manager
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Rena Kendall-Craden, Civic Engagement and Communications Director
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Malcolm Bromley, General Manager, Park Board
Gil Kelley, General Manager, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability
Lon LaClaire, Director, Transportation

FROM: Jerry Dobrovolny, General Manager, Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Next Steps Following the Flats Arterial Community Panel Process

Executive Summary

The Flats Arterial Community Panel considered a wide range of perspectives and wrestled with conflicting tensions and priorities between nine different grade separated arterial options. Staff have analyzed the prioritization of the values, evaluation and ranking of routes to inform the next steps before seeking a Council decision on the grade separated arterial alignment.

Staff will no longer pursue alignments on either William or Malkin, and will advance work on the panel's recommended route: the National-Charles Overpass, and the panel's second preferred route: the Prior/Venables Underpass.

Over the next few months, staff will conduct further analysis of the National-Charles Overpass and the Prior/Venables Underpass to explore ways to reduce the drawbacks of each route. Next steps include:

- Further technical analysis of the National-Charles option to identify opportunities to improve road safety or lessen costs;
- Hiring an independent consultant to refine cost estimates for land and property impacts, including relocating the Fire Training facility;
- Exploring the levels of support from potential external funding partners;
- Outreach with directly affected stakeholders;
- Exploring opportunities to lessen traffic impacts of an arterial on Prior Street; and
- Incorporating previous stakeholder and public input from the past five years of work.

Staff will return to Council in the fall of 2019 for a decision on the alignment of a grade separated arterial in the False Creek Flats.

Background

Freight rail activity is increasing in the Flats, and in order to address safety concerns, increase the reliability of local transit and goods movement, and support low-emissions transportation, the addition of arterial streets with grade separation from the rail line is crucial. As was identified in the False Creek Flats Rail Corridor Strategy (2008), the most recent grade separation project was the Powell Street Overpass, which was completed in 2014. It is now important to advance the grade separation of an arterial in the Flats between Hastings Street and Terminal Avenue that maintains an important east-west connection from Main Street to Clark Drive. Along with other local road closures, this would result in full separation of the rail corridor

In 2015, staff were directed to explore alternate routes for the grade separated arterial that could allow Prior Street to be downgraded from an arterial to a local-serving street. Through the public and stakeholder engagement during the False Creek Flats Area Plan process from 2015 to 2017, it became clear that all of the alternate arterial options presented challenges, and no one route emerged as the preferred option.

In order to engage both residents and businesses through a more in-depth conversation that would allow consideration of all the values, factors and trade-offs between the routes, the Flats Arterial Community Panel (FACP) was convened, and facilitated by an independent consultant. The randomly selected 42 panelists[1] were tasked with representing the local neighbourhood, business community, and city-wide residents to evaluate and recommend a route for the grade separated arterial. Their final report[2] was received by City Council and Park Board in late April 2019.

The outcomes of the Community Panel have informed the broader planning and technical review process led by City staff, in order to recommend a proposed alignment for a future grade separated arterial in this area of the False Creek Flats for Council's decision.

Initial Takeaways from the Community Panel's Evaluation

Participants of the Community Panel devoted an impressive amount of time and energy to serve their community and city. The panel received presentations on a wide range of topics, and heard directly from many different people with varying perspectives. The panel did a thorough analysis of advantages and drawbacks of each route option and its variations. In addition, they also seemed to work well together in their deliberations. Even when panelists had conflicting views, they were respectful and tried to find solutions that addressed a range of community and local business interests.

There is a lot to learn from the Community Panel's work, and what follows is an initial analysis that helped staff to determine next steps.

[1] In the end, 37 panelists participated in the full Community Panel process.
[2] The Flats Arterial Community Panel Final Report (April 2019) is herein quoted and referenced as FACP.

Values and Important Factors

In their evaluations of the routes, the Community Panel learned about and wrestled with many different issues, perspectives, and considerations. It is clear from the description of the panel's values that there were many important factors guiding their decision making, including but not limited to: community liveability, a desire for a holistic perspective, wanting to hear from all voices, food security, local economy impacts, the importance of parks and green spaces, reliable transportation connections and accessibility to work, school and social activities (FACP, 16).

The panel's description of the most significant advantages and drawbacks for each route shows how these values guided their analysis, alongside information they learned from presenters and community discussions (FACP, 31-44). However, similar to earlier phases of engagement, no one route for the arterial could easily address all the factors that were important to the panel or the broader community they were tasked with representing.

To help in their prioritization, panelists ranked six key factors in order of importance as follows:

1. Impacts on residents and the local neighbourhood.
2. Impacts on parks, recreation, community gardens, and other green spaces in the area.
3. Impacts on the movement of people and goods in the area.
4. Impacts on businesses locally and throughout the region.
5. Considerations of cost and constructability.
6. Impacts on public-serving civic facilities in the area.

This prioritization helps show what the panel considered to be more important in ranking the route options and making their recommendation. For example, the panel's top priorities were not considerations of cost and constructability, nor impacts on public serving facilities in the area. However, it is also evident that the key factors above are interrelated and different elements of each factor were important in the panel's evaluations of the routes. In addition, as the panel noted, "there remain conflicting priorities and tensions", which meant that ultimately they needed to arrive "at a place where everyone was committed to recommend the best option for everyone in the community, not just for our own personal interests" (FACP, 3).

Ranking of the Grade separated Arterial Route Options

Given the difficulty of coming to a recommendation of an arterial route by consensus, the panel used multiple rounds of ranked choice voting, accompanied by deliberation, to come to their final recommendation. This method of voting identifies the options with the most support among panelists – even if a particular route is not the first choice of most individual panelists. Importantly, this method of voting also shows which routes had the *least* amount of support among the panel.

In the first round of voting, five shortlisted options had the most support among panelists, including variations along National:

- National-Charles Overpass
- National-Civic Facilities Overpass
- National-Grant Overpass
- Prior/Venables Underpass
- Malkin North Overpass

This first round of voting indicates that neither the William route option, nor the two other variations on Malkin had broad support among panelists. We can assume based on the ranked order of the Community Panel's values that this is because these routes – with significant impacts to Strathcona Park and Produce Row businesses – were not supported by the panel.

After four rounds of voting,[3] the shortlist was reduced to two options. The National-Charles route option had a clear majority of support among the panel (67.6%) and the Prior/Venables underpass was the next highest ranked of the options (32.4%). Refer to **Appendix A** for maps of these two route options.

National-Charles Overpass

The advantages of the National-Charles route, as identified by the panel in order of importance: it does not impact Produce Row businesses; it "moves arterial traffic further away from residents" and allows Prior St to be downgraded to a local street; it does not impact Strathcona Park and the community gardens; it generally allows for a more complete street design, and despite its potential cost it has "the least impact on the community of businesses, park lands, and art spaces, all of which have intrinsic and intangible value that cannot be measured in dollars and cents" (FACP, 25-26).

The panel also noted what they saw as the most significant challenges of this route: high costs; longer construction time; high impact to civic services; safety concerns related to the S-curve design of the street; less convenient transit access for Strathcona residents; and some impact to businesses and artists – though importantly less than other National variations. In regards to the costs of this option, some of the panel members expressed a hope that actual costs for the project might be lower than projected and that funding partners would commit to funding a substantial share of the project, while others expressed concern that funding partners may not be secured and there would be compromises to other priorities and projects across the city.

The National-Charles route was a community-generated option proposed by the Strathcona Residents' Association in November 2018, which was shared with staff two months before the Community Panel began. Although panelists had information on the scale of impacts and costs relative to other routes, given the tight timeframe the same level of technical and cost analysis as the original National-Grant option was not available. The panel has asked for more study of this route, including more detail on the costs of acquiring land, mitigating property impacts, and the overpass structure.

Taking into account the different rounds of voting and the alternate proposal of the National-Straight option (refer to **Appendix B** for an explanation of why this variation is not technically feasible), it is apparent that a National alignment was preferred by many panelists. The National-Charles route in particular offered the advantages listed above, and in addition it was a community-generated option with fewer impacts than other National variations. It also presented a variation that some panelists hope will ultimately be less costly than the initial projected estimates.

Prior/Venables Underpass

The Prior/Venables underpass was the route option with the second most support after the National-Charles route. The panel identified the advantages of this route in order of importance as: it is the lowest cost option thereby enabling "opportunities for local community enhancements"; it does not impact Produce Row businesses; it has fewer impacts to parks and gardens, in particular the "wild spaces"; it provides easier and better transit access to local amenities and services; and it provides

[3] For a full account of the rounds of voting, see the FACP report p.27-28.

more reliable and resilient access to the new St. Paul's hospital (FACP, 31-32). An underpass was preferred more than an overpass because it would reduce the tendency for vehicles to speed downhill and could provide opportunities for better connections between the park and the neighbourhood (FACP, 32).

The ordered drawbacks were: the narrower street doesn't allow for large sidewalks or dedicated cycling facilities; the arterial on Prior St would continue to be perceived as "a separation between residents and Strathcona Park"; selecting Prior as an option could "further erode trust between the community and government" given previous Council commitments to downgrade the street; there is "significant resident opposition to Prior St as the arterial"; and a concern about the potential increase of traffic, including noise and air pollution (FACP, 31-32).

During the process, many panelists and community members questioned why the Prior/Venables underpass and overpass were included as options. They were included for consideration because if no alternate route for the arterial is approved by City Council and Park Board, the arterial would need to stay on Prior/Venables Street. Given the significant challenges of all the routes, it was important for the panel to evaluate all feasible options, including grade-separating the existing arterial on Prior/Venables Street. Furthermore, many of the options would necessitate that Prior/Venables Street remain the arterial for a long period of time until an alternate route is built and ready for use.

Based on the panel's report, a significant minority of panel members considered the Prior/Venables route to be the preferred option – whether as an arterial with an underpass, or as a downgraded local-serving street with an underpass only for transit and emergency access (see **Appendix C** for an explanation on why it is essential to maintain an arterial street in the area).

Next Steps

Respecting the Community Panel's evaluation of nine route variations, staff plan to advance work on a narrowed list of route options through the summer months to bring forward a recommendation to City Council in the fall of 2019. Based on our initial analysis of the panel's report, it is clear that the panel does not support routes with significant impacts to Strathcona Park or Produce Row businesses, and staff will no longer pursue alignments on either William or Malkin. Staff will instead focus on the panel's top two route choices for an arterial route with grade-separation: National-Charles overpass and Prior/Venables underpass. Specifically, staff will further evaluate the Community Panel's recommendation of the National-Charles alignment, including taking the time to refine the technical analysis and costing of this option to be on par with the original arterial alignment options.

It is important to highlight that although both these routes avoid the most significant impacts to parks and community gardens, and Produce Row businesses, each route also has serious drawbacks. The most significant of which are that National-Charles has a high cost, and Prior/Venables underpass would not allow Prior to be downgraded to a local-serving street, respecting the longstanding community preference for a new arterial route alignment option. Given this, in the coming months staff will explore different ways the City could address these drawbacks. In particular, staff will explore ways to reduce the cost-burden of the National-Charles option, or lessen the impacts of Prior/Venables as an arterial street on the adjacent neighbourhood.

This work will include:

- **Further technical analysis of the National-Charles option**: Staff have engaged an engineering consulting firm to refine the conceptual design of the National-Charles overpass. The firm will test the alignment as proposed by the Strathcona Residents' Association, along with any variations that would improve road safety or provide opportunities to lessen the structure length or property impacts, thereby also reducing costs.

- **Hire an independent consultant to refine cost estimates**: Staff will hire a consultant with expertise in commercial real estate to refine the cost estimates of the National-Charles alignment. This will include providing a third-party market valuation of the land and property impacts, including the costs of relocating the Fire Training facility.

- **Explore external funding opportunities**: This project requires support from external partners. Given that grade-separation supports regional goods movement, potential funding partners include the Port of Vancouver, railway operators (CN and BNSF), TransLink, and senior governments. Staff previously applied for Transport Canada funding through the National Trade Corridors Fund and earlier programs, but have so far been unsuccessful in the absence of a decision about the route for the arterial. Staff will reach out to potential funding partners to gauge their likely levels of support for the shortlisted options noted above.

- **Explore opportunities to lessen traffic impacts on Prior St**: Staff will build on the findings from previous safety and livability studies (refer to **Appendix D** for a summary) to explore ways to improve the walking environment of Prior St, in particular the crossings to/from the park and address perceived traffic safety concerns, which can impact livability as much as observed safety issues. Staff will also identify how to monitor long-term change to travel patterns in the area, once the highway-like infrastructure of the viaducts are replaced with a more complete and urbanized street network.

- **Review input from previous planning and engagement work**: Staff will review and incorporate input from all the previous work during the past 5 years for the National and Prior/Venables options, including public engagement feedback from the local community, affected businesses, and goods movement stakeholders.

After extensive planning and community engagement spanning almost 5 years, it is important that Council come to a decision on the grade separated arterial route in fall 2019. Rail activity is expected to increase and some of its impacts to the community, such as serious injuries or fatal train incidents, can be prevented by grade-separating trains from people walking, biking, and driving.

As well, a reliable street network is fundamental to serving employment lands including a new regional healthcare campus. In order to deliver a significant public benefit to the city and region, certainty on one arterial route is needed to advance the St. Paul's Hospital through rezoning and towards opening in 2026. The arterial route can either be accommodated through the St. Paul's site as a Malkin alignment (to support the National-Charles option) or on Prior (to support the Prior/Venables underpass option). However, without a Council decision on a route, the street right-of-way would need to be preserved for both alignments; land which could otherwise be integrated for other aspects of the hospital design. Furthermore a letter to the City Manager dated May 17, 2019 from Providence Health Care has indicated "the cost for delay is approximately $7 million per month" in delivering the regional hospital.

A summary of the next steps leading to, and following Council's route decision is as follows:

Timeline	Next Steps
May to August 2019	• Further analysis of Community Panel's recommendation and evaluation • Further technical analysis of the National-Charles Overpass and Prior/Venables Underpass options • Outreach with potential funding partners, and directly impacted stakeholders • Review of other public and stakeholder input from previous engagement during the False Creek Flats Area planning process
September to November 2019	• Staff complete a report to Council on a final recommended route • Council decision on the route for the grade separated arterial (October 2) • St. Paul's Hospital and Healthcare Campus rezoning referral and public hearing (dates to be determined)
2020 and beyond	• Secure funding from external partners • Detailed design and mitigations with directly impacted property owners, businesses, and stakeholders • Construction, following design and financing approval

Conclusion

The Flats Arterial Community Panel put a substantial amount of effort and thought into their work; they considered a wide range of perspectives, wrestled with conflicting priorities and tensions, and thoroughly assessed the advantages and drawbacks of many routes and variations. Staff have gained a deeper understanding of the considerations and values that the community prioritizes.

Over the next few months, staff will conduct further analysis of the panel's recommended route, the National-Charles Overpass, as well as the panel's second preferred route, the Prior/Venables Underpass. Incorporating what has been learned over five years of evaluation and engagement, staff will return to Council in the fall of 2019 for a decision on the alignment for a grade separated arterial in the False Creek Flats.

Should you require further information, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Jerry W. Dobrovolny, P.Eng., MBA
General Manager, Engineering Services
604.873.7331 | jerry.dobrovolny@vancouver.ca